

Structural Chiropractic
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Cold Therapy

Cold therapy with ice is the best immediate treatment for acute injuries because it can reduce swelling and pain. Ice is a vasoconstrictor (causes the blood vessels to narrow) and it limits bleeding at the injury site. Apply ice to the affected area for 10 to 15 minutes at a time, through a thin towel may be best. Allow the skin temperature to return to normal before icing a second or third time. You can ice an acute injury several times a day.

Cold therapy is also helpful in treating some overuse injuries or chronic pain in athletes. An athlete who has chronic knee pain that increases after running may want to ice the injured area *after* each run to reduce or prevent inflammation. Never ice a chronic injury before exercise.

The best way to ice an injury is with a high quality ice pack that conforms to the body part being iced. You can also get good results from a bag of frozen peas, ice massage with water frozen in a dixie cup (peel the cup down as the ice melts) or a basic bag of ice.

Heat Therapy

Heat is generally used for chronic injuries or injuries that have no inflammation. Sore, stiff, nagging muscle or joint pain is ideal for the use of heat therapy. Athletes with chronic pain or injuries may use heat therapy *before* exercise to increase the elasticity of joint connective tissues and to stimulate blood flow. Heat can also help relax tight or spasmed muscles. Do not apply heat after exercise.

Because heat increases circulation and raises skin temperature you should not apply heat to acute injuries or injuries that show signs of inflammation. Safely apply heat to an injury 15 to 20 minutes at a time and use enough layers between your skin and the heating source to prevent burns. Moist heat is best. You could try using a hot wet towel. Specialty hot packs can be purchased or you may use a heating pad. Never leave heating pads on for more than 20 minutes at a time or while sleeping.

Because some injuries can be serious, you should see your doctor if your injury does not improve or gets worse within 48 hours.